

AMBASSADOR/ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. CROWE, JR.

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Admiral, I will refer anyone who wants to know of your long background in the military to your book Line of Fire, which was published when?

CROWE: Around 1991.

Q: So we'll pick it up at the point when you retired from military as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Tell us how you became involved with President Clinton, at that time Governor Clinton?

CROWE: I was living in Washington, staying in Alexandria after I retired. I had quite a few friends from Little Rock, Arkansas, two of whom were Naval Academy classmates who I had known for a long time. They were interested in me endorsing Clinton. I did not know Clinton and originally wasn't very interested in the proposition.

In the early stages of the campaign someone called and asked me to come up with three or four senior officers, retired, to talk to Clinton about military affairs. We went up to Philadelphia and did that. That's when I first met Clinton, although he said he met me once before, but I didn't recall that. That was in the early stages of the campaign. I was very impressed with him at the time, particularly his mind and his quick grasp of facts. Also, I was impressed that he was that interested in strategy and what the military was doing and so forth.

Q: Was there any concern on your part before you met him, that he was the first President in a very long time that hadn't served in the military? And that his wing of the party or many supporters were somewhat anti-militaristic?

CROWE: That ultimately came up and had a great deal to do with me supporting him. I do not consider myself a Democrat or a Republican, I never have. If I sat down and toted it up, I've voted Republican more than I have Democratic. When I was made Chairman, nobody asked me how I voted or what Party I was in. The subject never came up. As the campaign proceeded I got very distressed.



I thought a lot of the criticism of Clinton was misdirected and also a tactical ploy to divert attention from the real subject of the campaign, which I thought was the economy of the country. I felt a lot of the arguments the Republican were using were flippant and not very serious. They didn't have a worthwhile aim which was to get attention off the fact they were not doing too well economically. Then, the more I heard of the criticism of Clinton, that he had no military experience and that he had not gone to Vietnam, which didn't surprise me, I was sure that would come up in the campaign. Then it became quite virulent, and a lot was made of it. The more I thought about what the Republicans were saying, not explicitly, but certainly by inference. If you extended their reasoning, you would see they were saying if this man is elected President, the military shouldn't serve him. I thought that was rather dangerous, I didn't like that at all.

When I witnessed the Republican convention on television and saw their close association with the Ultra-right, with the Bushes sitting with Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell and Mrs. Quayle and the Vice President criticizing several sectors of our society, I thought it was the most amazing display I'd ever seen in a country that only had two main political parties, and one of them said a lot of people couldn't be in their party. The social divisions that they were prepared to live with really appalled me.

That's when I thought maybe I will get in this campaign. I didn't think it would have too much impact but ultimately I went down to see Clinton and said if he thought it would be helpful I would be glad to endorse him. We held a press conference in Little Rock, and I did that. It turned out that it had much more impact than I ever dreamed it would, I didn't take it very seriously. That was the first campaign I'd ever been involved in personally - probably the last as well.

Q: When you made this announcement I can just imagine what your classmates, and many of the people with whom you served must have screamed bloody murder.

CROWE: I lost a lot of friends, at least temporarily. I made some new friends, some of whom I didn't even want! I did have some classmates that objected strongly. Many people characterized me in some rather extreme ways on the assumption that once I had served for a Republican President meant I was Republican and that I was a Republican all my life. I didn't understand that connection at all. I didn't understand what they were talking about.

There is an older attitude prevalent in the military, that military officers are apolitical. Many people felt that it should govern the rest of their lives. Of course it's not true, we've had many career military officers go into politics, serve in Cabinets, do all kinds of things.

Q: Including being President.



CROWE: Yes, including a classmate of mine, President Carter. So, I really didn't take that kind of criticism, or that kind of stricture seriously. I wasn't even wedded to the Republican parts when I was serving under it. As I said, they never asked me what I was going to vote, they never asked me my political affiliation. I assumed I was selected for the job for reasons that had nothing to do with politics. I've always believed that on active duty you support the government, you support the President. It's not the job of the President to get along with you, it's your job to get along with the President. If you are asked to do things you cannot accept your recourse is to resign. Once you resign you can say, argue or do whatever you want. You're free to vote and free to express yourselves like any other American citizen. If you wish, you're free to participate in the political clash of arms. I have always subscribed to that code and I do now. I thought it sort of fascist to tell me I couldn't have a political opinion.

Q: Did you have problems with the Clinton staff? I think as an observer of these phenomena, every Presidential campaign gets a lot of young, rather bright, arrogant people, very pushy. It doesn't make any difference what political stripe they are, they all seem to fall into that pattern.

CROWE: I understand what you are talking about. Are you talking about did I have trouble with them during the campaign?

Q: Yes.

CROWE: I didn't have any trouble during the campaign. They were thrilled by my endorsement. I assume that there were some who wanted Clinton to be anti-military, etc., etc., but I never ran into those. What little involvement I had in the campaign was with his staff, but also directly with the President. I met with him several times on military subjects. Once he became President, I withdrew from that. He would call me and ask me something. I'd say you have got a whole military working for you over there, get their advice, you don't need mine anymore.

I was not worried by the fact that he had not served in Vietnam. There have been many Presidents who have not served in the military. I don't know where this comes from. If we were going to limit serving Presidents to ones that have military experience, we're cutting out a great segment of our population. I don't think that's part of the deal. I don't know where that comes from.

Q: I think it's the handle of opportunity in which you can attack somebody.



CROWE: After I did it, I heard from many, many people. I heard from a lot of enlisted people thanking me. I got calls and wires from all over the country saying I'm afraid to express my opinion in this unit and I really appreciate a career military man coming out and boosting the Clinton campaign. I also had a lot military officers call me and say they agreed with me. Many more said they didn't. As a generalization, I think most of the officer corps in our country is Republican-inclined and most of the rest of our people are Democratically-inclined.

Q: It's very dangerous of course to have an officer corps that becomes polarized.

CROWE: Absolutely.

Q: I'm a professional foreign service officer and the same thing, you serve the President.

CROWE: Throughout my career, people were playing with fire. This was evident in the handling by the professional military of the homosexual argument.

Q: Would you talk about that because that became sort of the focus at one point about President Clinton's stand on homosexuals in the military.

CROWE: You know he said that all through the campaign, that he was planning to bring homosexuals into the military. He received very little feedback. Very few people screamed or hollered. Even the press gave it luke-warm coverage. He got little mail, or none. He was quite frustrated when the first time he expressed that sentiment after he got elected the world descended on him. I actually advised him that I didn't think that was a good idea. I thought what he should do was leave it to the Courts. I didn't think he should get into a public argument, I suggested he should refer the question to the Courts. But, he didn't do that. I think in retrospect, he would agree that from a political standpoint it was a big mistake.

On the other hand, it had some impact on the military that was very unfortunate. First of all some of our senior military officers did some things they shouldn't have done. They took sides in the public argument and they made some extreme statements. Then they got quite upset when the enlisted men started criticizing the President. They discovered, much to their amazement, they were about to open Pandora's box, and that wasn't a very good idea. Actually, at one point I was told the Joint Chiefs of Staff met to discuss getting the horse back in the box - closed again and back where it should be and that is that career officers stay out of these arguments publicly. This is what they should have done on this one.



When I heard a couple of our most senior Army officers testify that allowing homosexuals [in the military] would destroy the U.S. Army - number one, that's just nonsense, and number two, that they said it I thought was just horrible, and number three, if the U.S. Army can't control a few homosexuals in its ranks they're in really tough shape. I know for a fact they can handle it. They've had homosexuals as long as I've been in the military, so has the Navy. It was alright to argue with the President behind the closed doors and to make sure he knew their views, but to take time prodding was not wise.

Q: I spent four years in the barracks in the Air Force and ...

CROWE: Yeah, they were there, big deal! We put a huge investment in training our mid-career junior officers. My son is a Marine officer and I asked him about it. He said "Well, they would complicate my life some but it's nothing we can't handle." The very fact of the implication of the argument was that heterosexuals are no problem. Of course that's fatally flawed. I've spent my life trying to lead heterosexuals and they can get into some real scrapes and do some really irrational things. They're very tough to organize and discipline. The homosexual thing was going to make it very difficult but that heterosexuals are just peachy-keen, that's not exactly right!

Q: Did you get the feeling during the campaign and immediately afterwards that there was this almost polarization? I can think back when I was a kid the passions that went against Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, not so much in the military but in the country, just as with Clinton.

CROWE: I definitely witnessed it in my own family, vis-a-vis Roosevelt. My father was a life-long Democrat. When Roosevelt ran for his third term, he bolted from the Party and spent the rest of his life complaining about President Roosevelt. He detested the President. There were many people like that, many of his friends were the same way, which I saw personally. They just couldn't muster enough votes to defeat him. I think there are some parallels with Clinton in that regard.

On the military side, there was a very strong resentment against Kennedy. Even though he had military service. There was a man who had served in the U.S. Navy! The way he handled the Cuban crisis, not the missile crisis raised the military's hackles.

Q: Yes, the Bay of Pigs.



CROWE: The Bay of Pigs was poorly received in the military. I've been through several crises where the military simply disagreed with the President. First of all there was Truman when he cut our appropriations dramatically after World War II and sent us into Korea totally unprepared. His Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, was detested in the military.

Q: With reason.

CROWE: Yes. We saw a lot of the same thing with Kennedy. Then of course during the Vietnam War we were constantly at odds with every government. Some of the things we were required to do, without American support, etcetera, etcetera... So the fact that Clinton had a little trouble with the military leadership was certainly not unprecedented.

Q: Well, when you were talking to Clinton during this time when you were giving him some strategic advice and all, were you talking about other problems such as we already had a commitment Somalia and Yugoslavia was breaking apart. Was this a subject of conversation?

CROWE: No, I didn't have too many conversations with him on that. I was still here in Washington, before I went to England, when the Somali thing happened. I did get a call from him a couple of times to come and talk to him about Somalia. I had some conversations with his staff members who had called me on Somalia. I was also the Chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board and I headed a group that did an intelligence study on our problems in Somalia. At that time I wasn't really advising the President who was using his built-in machinery for it.

Q: Can I talk just a bit about Somalia and your view of this as it was very much a foreign policy matter. What was your reading of it as it developed?

CROWE: I go back to the intelligence study that I was involved in. First of all, the people who worked with the President were just like the group you described earlier, younger people, very inexperienced. It wasn't true of his National Security Advisor, even though I don't think he understood Intelligence very well.

It came out in our view that the intelligence failure in Somalia was right in the National Security Council, which did not like our report very well. There were a number of people handling Somali affairs that expected way too much from Intelligence. They expected Intelligence to make their decisions for them not just give them information about what was going on there. They couldn't understand why Intelligence didn't advise them correctly on what to do. That's not the function of an Intelligence organization, it's not what they do. It made for considerable confusion right at the top as to what was going out to Somalia. The President himself wasn't very interested in the intelligence, which was most unfortunate.



As far as the problem itself, I almost choke in saying this, I think we were very naive, we seem to be naive so many times. You pay a definite price when you intervene in somebody's affairs, I don't care how you do it. When you go to another country, particularly with armed force, you're not going to please everybody and it's going to cost you, if not one day, then another. Now, sometimes the costs are worth it. But don't think you can get in and out cost-free.

I thought the military side of it was very poorly handled, we did some tactical things (which I won't get into) which I thought should have been better. Politically we were very naive. I can actually remember conversations with the National Security Council saying Admiral Howe works for the United Nations, we can't tell him what to do. And of course, that's just sheer nonsense. He may work for the United Nations, but those troops were ours, they weren't anybody else's. We had any kind of control we wanted to exert over them, even finger-tip control. It took us awhile to learn that. The very idea that we couldn't control our own troops because they worked for the United Nations absolutely appalled me.

We clearly misread the local political scene. I think the people on the scene did that. They felt they could stamp out corruption, straighten out or discipline some of the only political leaders Somalia had. It didn't work very well.

From a military perspective, one of the prevalent attitudes that has developed, a very tough one, is that we can actually use military force and not lose anybody. When we lost 18 people, you would have thought from reading our press that it was the end of the world. If you really believe that, that we should not lose those kind of people, then we should not use military force, we should stay out. It's not a neat and tidy business, it's dirty and people do resist being bullied or pushed around or told what to do. If you use arms to do it they're going to resist you with arms and they're going to kill some people. We clearly were not neutral in Somalia.

We started out that way, just like we did in Lebanon, and we lost our neutral focus somewhere along the line. Then got involved in nation-making and so forth, which we had not been prepared to do originally, and we shouldn't be doing, and we certainly were not equipped to do it with the forces we had there. On the other hand, please bear in mind the deal with a problem like Somalia is very hard. No matter what organization you have, hard problems are still hard.

Q: There were starving people in Somalia, that's why we went in there. We move from that to try and make it better so people wouldn't starve once we left.

CROWE: We sort of have an attitude that we can make people like us. We want every place in the world to be like us. I'm afraid that's a little beyond our reach.

Q: You were Chairman of the Intelligence Board from when to when?



CROWE: When Clinton came in, I became the Chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. As I recall he came in in 1993?

Q: In January 1993.

CROWE: I took that job in February or March of 1993. I held it until I went to Great Britain in 1994.

Q: I recall, very much, in your books you talk about the problems of intelligence, saying that intelligence has a tendency to generally show that if something happens, the world will fall apart. It seemed to be that they usually provide people the most extreme views.

CROWE: Bear in mind, my career embraced the Cold War. So, most of my comments on Intelligence were with a Cold War background. The Cold War Intelligence only had one function and that was to follow the Soviet Union. We did a lot of other things, but they were peripheral, and they didn't play a very heavy role. The whole intelligence effort was focused and aimed and targeted on the Soviet Union. It was always painted as the end of Western civilization is near if we don't do A, B, and C.

The Intelligence community felt it was their job to always build a case that we needed more arms and more money. The senior officers were not above using intelligence reports to support their case for weapons and so forth. I think there's no question that they overdid it. In fact, in my conversations with Marshall Achamehev, who was head of the Russian military, we used to laugh. Both of us had the same view of our intelligence people that they overdid things! They always overexpanded the other guy and undersold their own forces. It was joke between us.

Q: Did you find when you were on the Intelligence Board that the Cold War was over yet Intelligence was still a major factor? Was that still going on?



CROWE: Yes, it was. Number one they missed the demise of the Soviet Union. They were way behind. They did that while I was Chairman. It was clear to me, I could remember one or two things coming up. They talked about the Soviet Union as if they weren't reading the newspapers, much less developed clandestine intelligence. They were in disarray with the fall of the [Berlin] Wall like everybody else. What's the Intelligence community going to do, what's our new mission? They had some built-in major problems, as did the whole government including our foreign policy apparatus. I don't particularly fault them for that. As a matter of fact, they suffered from a syndrome that grips the country that says when the size of your Military goes down, the size of your Intelligence organization should go down. If we're going to give the Military less money, we should give Intelligence less money. To be frank about it the opposite is probably true. When the Military goes down you should be worrying about your Intelligence community and probably upping the appropriation. They are your main hedge against surprise when your military goes down.

For three reasons, and we saw this in spades at the end of the Cold War. The Intelligence community is going to be saddled with a host of requirements they haven't had before. In Somalia, for example, we had completely withdrawn our Intelligence presence. All of a sudden Somalia comes up on the radar scope as a number one problem and we had no intelligence people there. Secondly, if the military is going to be less, warning becomes a premium. You need an Intelligence community to tell you whether the world's in trouble or not, ahead of time. Any amount of money to get that answer is worth it. You shouldn't be cutting back your Intelligence community.

If you look back on World War II, the one thing this Country did right in the 1920's, 1930's was the effort we put into code breaking. That was the best spent money and one of the very few things we did in the 20's and 30's that put us in a better position to fight World War II. That's not the Congressional view of Intelligence at all. They think well we're cutting down here, we're going to cut Intelligence back too, we don't need it any longer. That became crystal clear when I was Chairman of the Intelligence Advisory Board. Although we weren't there to defend the Intelligence community or to make sure it got more money, every problem we dealt with we ran into that conundrum.

Q: What was your mission with this group?

CROWE: It was sort of strange. You don't have a continuing mission. You're there to serve at the pleasure of the President, to look at things the President wants looked at. You may suggest to him something that should be looked at, but nevertheless, we don't have a continuing oversight role for all intelligence or anything. We were there to do specific things and historically that is what they have done, i.e. missile studies on a particular problem, something like Somalia that didn't go right, why didn't it go right? Something like counterterrorism, is that really a big problem or not? What should we be doing about counterterrorism?



The Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board tries to make some informed estimates and come back with advice. The advice goes to the President solely, nobody else. He can release it to anybody he wants to, but the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board did not work for the Intelligence community, it didn't work for anybody but the President.

Q: Did Yugoslavia take up a good bit...

CROWE: Not much. We didn't do much about it when I was there. As left, we finished the Somalian study.

Q: That was your major focus?

CROWE: It was one of them just before I left. We had two or three others. They were also, of course, very involved in the nonproliferation questions. A collection of questions. The Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board does a lot on collection, whether we've done it well, or not done it well.

Q: How did your appointment to the Court of St. James come about?

CROWE: Early in the Administration, the President and I talked about what I would like to do. I said I was connected with several Boards and I was having a pretty good life. I enjoyed my work outside the military. I said I'd like to be the Chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. I wanted that because I didn't have to be confirmed and I didn't have to give up any of my activities. I was not paid. I said, "PFIAB," and he said, "What's PFIAB?" So, I had to tell him what it was and that's how I became the Chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

Q: PFIAB?

CROWE: President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. PFIAB! That suited me very well. I had been in that job about six months when he called me one time and asked me if I would be interested in any kind of job in Washington. I said, "I don't think I would, I've done that, I had 47 years in the Navy. I spent about half my career in Washington." The only thing I'd really be interested in, I wasn't eligible for, and that was to be Secretary of the Defense. There is a law that you can't be the Secretary of Defense until you've been out of the military 10 years. He didn't know about that, he was sort of surprised at that.



He said is there anything else you'd like to do, would you like to be an Ambassador? I said I might like that, let me think about it. I saw him again and he said would you like to go to Russia? I gave it some thought, I had some medical problems, mainly knee problems. I mentioned it to my doctor and he said, "Don't go to Russia." I get cold, and I felt if I was a younger man, the intellectual challenge of Russia would be wonderful. I don't speak Russian and I wasn't a younger man. When I went to see Secretary Christopher to tell him I wasn't interested in the job, as I walked out of the house my wife hollered "You tell that S.O.B. you're over 70 years old!" Consequently, I went immediately to the hospital and put a new knee in my leg. I figured if I was going to do anything in life I'd better get a new knee. I did that.

Then the President called back and said would you like to go to China. I said the same thing is true, you should send somebody that speaks the language, somebody that's younger and somebody that's in better health. He said how about Great Britain, and I said I may be back to you on that! I talked to my wife. I did my doctoral dissertation on Great Britain, I've been an Anglophile most of my life and I have many, many friends in the British military. I said two things: number one, I'd like to go; and number two, you have a professional over there right now and I don't think you should order him out of that billet until he's had a full tour.

Q: Ray...

CROWE: Ray Seitz. I said if he was a political appointee, sure throw him out of there right now. That's fair game, but you shouldn't pull Ray out ahead of time. He said what's a full term, and I said three years. He called me back and said, "Well you dug your own grave. You won't have three years for a few months yet are you willing to go then? I said sure I'd go then.

Q: How about confirmation?

CROWE: I had a little problem, a little problem, with John McCain. He never liked my testimony on pre-Desert Storm, where I thought we should have tried sanctions a little longer. I wasn't against attacking Iraq. Even my testimony got all torqued in the newspaper and John McCain never did like it very well. He held my nomination up for a full three or four days, but otherwise I didn't have any problems. My confirmation hearing was not a serious hearing.

Q: When you went there, obviously you were talking with the European Bureau and the United Kingdom desk at the Department of State, what were the issues you were carrying in your portfolio?



CROWE: Let me say ahead of that, the big problem I had with the State Department were the conflict of interest people. I never forgot that experience. These are the lawyers and the ethical section of the State Department who subscribe wholly to preemptive surrender. Instead of saying well, the Congress may object to so and so, let's go find out; they say if Congress objects let's do it right now and get rid of it! Stocks and so forth and so forth.

The biggest problem I had was when I served on the Texaco Board, they gave all the Directors a million dollar insurance policy to go to the school of their choice when they died. Texaco continues to pay those policies even after you retire from the Board. The State Department lawyer told me I couldn't do that. I asked why not and they said, "If Texaco continues to pay the premiums, it means they're paying you." I said that was sort of strange because number one I have to die in order to get this and number two the million dollars is going to go to a U.S. organization, the U.S. Naval Academy. I believe if you keep this up the next lawyer in this office is going to be the one from the Naval Academy! You're literally saying that you're not going to allow this million dollars to go to the U.S. Government.

Then I brought my lawyer in there and we argued about it for awhile and they finally gave in. I had to sign a picky letter saying I would not change the beneficiary of that policy while I was in the Government, which really upset me something fierce. I thought it was the stupidest argument I have ever been in. In any event, I didn't like their whole approach to ethics. I thought I should be allowed to do certain things and if the Congress wanted to object at the confirmation hearing, then let's hear about it. Then we'll do something about it.

When I went to Great Britain it was clear right away that I was going to be involved in a problem I knew nothing about. That was the Irish problem. That did consume an awful lot of our time. Otherwise, the reorientation of NATO and Yugoslavia and the British position vis-a-vis the European Union and their position on Russia, were all majors issues we would be dealing with. In all fairness, on those issues, with some very seldom exceptions, we were in lockstep with the British. As far as nourishing the special relationship we enjoy with Britain, and it is special whether we like it or not, those substantive arguments really were not fierce enough to complicate my stay very much. Ireland was very complicated but being Ambassador to Great Britain in this day and age is a very pleasant experience.

Q: Did you find the Clinton Administration, being Democratic and tending to be a little more viscerally on the side of the Irish Republicans, as a problem?

CROWE: Very much so. First of all, it became obvious very quickly that State wasn't going to handle this problem. On Irish matters. I did not deal with the State Department. I dealt with the National Security Council. State Department literally opted out.

Q: It just didn't want to get into this...



CROWE: They wanted to and they tried, but they discovered early in the game that Lake wasn't going to let them in it.

Q: This is Tony Lake the National Security Advisor.

CROWE: And Nancy Soderburg, his deputy. They were going to handle Ireland problems. Of course it was peculiar to begin with. Ireland may be a foreign policy problem with us but to the British it's a domestic policy problem. So I didn't deal with a foreign office on Ireland, I dealt with the NIO, North Ireland Office. In my own government I talked with Lake and Soderburg. I don't think the President had the attitudes you described but I think his lieutenants did. They were very pro-Irish. They weren't IRA-pro, but their sympathies were with a united Ireland and their sympathies were anti-British. Their attitudes put them partially in the Sein Finn camps.

We were playing on a larger foreign policy canvas with Great Britain and we had nothing going with the Republic of Ireland of any great moment. Had the British been more aggressive, they would have stuck it in our ear time and time again. We treated the British poorly on the Irish problem; the British, however, never lost their restraint - privately, they were often very upset.

Q: Is this going back to the Irish immigrant in the United States? This has gotten almost ingrained in the body politic.

CROWE: I don't know where this came from, but everybody in the business had their own agenda, their own background and their own experiences. Part of it was, I think, that the NSC was more anti-British than it was pro-Irish. It was a very narrow-minded policy that really didn't take into account the larger world problems we had at all.

Then over and above that, I could not believe at times the number one foreign policy priority of the United States was counterterrorism! We were endorsing the Sein Finn. They were overlooking the IRA in order to get them to talk. They were counting some things that were completely contrary to our number one approach to terrorists around the world. The IRA was every bit as much terrorists as the Palestinians or anybody else. The idea they're political martyrs is just nonsense. We violated our own principles something fierce and I was surprised the Administration didn't get more heat in this regard. On the other hand, the President gets a lot of heat he doesn't deserve so why shouldn't he get a lot of credit where he can find it?

Q: What was the role of the American Ambassador during this time?



CROWE: Northern Ireland was part of Great Britain and we have a Consul there now, which we probably wouldn't have had except for this problem. We would have eliminated it. It was essentially the lead-in to North Ireland politics. The Sein Finn was very wary, however. They much preferred to deal with the Ambassador down in Dublin because she was very sympathetic to them.

Q: Who was this?

CROWE: Jean Kennedy Smith.

Q: President Kennedy's sister.

CROWE: Seitz wrote a lot about that in the book he just published. All of it was essentially correct. He was roasted by many sympathizers, but it was true. It probably wasn't the smartest thing in the world to talk about. In any event, we followed and reported developments in Northern Ireland and conveyed messages. I met with all the leaders in the Northern Ireland parties and went over there quite a bit. I spoke some in Northern Ireland.

At one point I delivered a demarche to Gerry Adams which was one omy...

Q: Gerry Adams being...

CROWE: The political leader of Sein Finn and a former terrorist. Clearly an IRA member, no matter what he might say otherwise. I got a big kick out of that. I had heard about demarches all my life and had never seen one. All of a sudden I presented one! I did a lot of calling on the Irish leaders that were in the Parliament in London. I liaised with the British, Patrick Mayhew who was the head of the Northern Ireland Office. I used to discuss and talk with him all the time. We would give our advice to Washington, advice that was seldom listened to.

Q: Do you think that over the years the British had gotten so used to this American almost irrationality about Ireland that rather than disturb the basic relationship, they'd sort of grit their teeth and let the NIO man/woman be the flak-catcher?



CROWE: Exactly. They put such great stock in the overall relationship that they overlooked an awful lot that we do. They're willing to go to great lengths not to jeopardize our relationship. Many times I sat there while people in Washington came to talk to them, including Lake. Lake would propose some outrageous scheme and I know they (British) just detested what he was suggesting but they would very calmly deal with it, pacify him in some way and never really get upset. I was probably more upset than they were. I was sort of ashamed of my Government at times with the Irish problem. I didn't feel we were very ethical about it. We were dealing with real murderers. I'm not against that, there comes a time in all these problems when you have to deal with those people. You don't have to put a halo around them to deal with them however. Deal with on their terms, not on some fanciful, mystical plain.

Q: We've come to terms with Shamir and Begin, Jonial Quinata in Kenya. This is how you get the power in a lot of places. Were you trying to make us more forceful in trying to keep money coming from the United States going into IRA coffers?

CROWE: We certainly followed that problem. Actually, there wasn't much coming, even with Gerry Adams fund-raising. I didn't think such fund-raising was absolutely necessary. Adams wanted U.S. government recognition and money.

Q: You were saying you were actually for...

CROWE: We were for neutrality. Over a period of months it dawned on Washington that they weren't getting anywhere with this "tilting" sides and so forth, and that they should do what we said we were going to do. The problem was that we weren't neutral in some of the things that we did. The idea that our gestures and compromises with the IRA brought them to the table I think is sort of fanciful. It may have helped some people reach that conclusion. The IRA was too tough for that. They would act in their own interest no matter what. They weren't going to let some government talk them into doing something they didn't want to do. If we had suggested something they didn't like they would have stuck it right down our ear. They were very hard-nosed and battle tested.

The kind of things the President said, when he was over there, in his speeches was just right. It was we're for the people who are risking peace, take risks for peace, we want peace, etc., etc. When he actually visited Northern Ireland the outpouring of emotion was just incredible. I've never seen anything like that. How a country could honor a third country's President more than they do their own leaders was really interesting. On the other hand, six months later, I forget the name of the little place they had the showdown, the changed attitude that we hoped would develop just disappeared in an afternoon.



Everybody talked peace but to erase those emotions and prejudices that have been built over the centuries, you don't get rid of them that way. I really think that the genius of the whole mechanism, as Mitchell put it, was to keep people talking. That was a British idea, not an American one. So we were sponsoring talks, under great trying circumstances, in order to get these people all to the table. I don't think they came to the table because of the atmosphere we created. They came to the table because nobody wanted to be out in the cold when talks did start, that included Adams. If they let him, he'd come to the table no matter what the United States had done.

So we did the only thing we could. The best move the President of the United States made in the whole business was to appoint George Mitchell. George Mitchell turned out to be a superb negotiator, a man of infinite patience. He sat through some of the damndest discussions you can imagine and some of the nonsense day after day, hour after hour just to keep those talks going. He never lost his cool, he never panicked and he kept them right back in the center, everybody gets part of the deal.

Major would have been much more forthcoming in bringing people to the table because he started it. The political courage for starting this effort was Major's. He had a majority of three, then two, then one. He had a strong right wing that was more than happy to throw him out of office if he didn't lean toward the Protestants in Northern Ireland. His flexibility was severely restricted. He really did a marvelous job considering the trying circumstances he had. He was a very courageous man. I'm a tremendous admirer of John Major.

Then Tony Blair comes in. He and Major had the same ideas on Ireland. Blair supported Major when he was in power and Major turned right around and supported Blair when he was in power. Blair had one great difference though he had a majority of 200 and something! He could waste a lot of shots.

I'd say the first [inspired] move was Mitchell and the second crucial attempt was taken by Blair and Mollen, the minister for Northern Ireland, when they said we're going to set a specific date. That's the end of this and we're going to set a date. When that date comes, if there is no agreement the two governments will submit for referendum their suggestions. They stuck to that and that really put the political leaders in a hell of a bite. In the end, under Mitchell's exceptional leadership, they hammered out an agreement. That's what they should have done earlier. It was not a new idea, it had been discussed many times. I suggested our government support an idea like that. I thought whether Sein Finn came to the table or not was irrelevant. I suggested we should get these talks going and if Sein Finn wants to come fine, if they don't, go ahead without them. Washington just couldn't believe that for a minute. In the end, Sein Finn did come and the agreement was not only a constructive step forward - it was a great political victory for the government of Ireland.



A year or two before the agreement, I sat down with the Irish Ambassador to Britain one day and asked what do you really think is going to come out of these talks? In the end, what is the best we can do? He essentially described what has happened. He said we're not going to satisfy everybody, and this agreement is not going to satisfy everybody. There are going to be some extremists outside this agreement and they're still killing some people. We're going to cut out those extremists, and to marginalize them, hopefully, with progress. Just like the provisional IRA wasn't as big as the first IRA and the next group won't be as big as the PIRA.

I think this agreement, with any luck, has done that. Not everybody's for it. Something that gets lost in the publicity in the United States, it is difficult to determine exactly who supported the agreement, because people don't vote on the ballot whether they are Protestant or Catholic. The Protestants who voted for this are probably a very small majority, somewhere between 50-55%. That's not good news for the agreement, but that doesn't make it into the newspaper here. They needed more than that. The Catholics probably voted 95% for the agreement. Now we have to just wait and see.

Q: While you were there did Senator Kennedy cause problems?

CROWE: He caused some severe problems for the government through his sister going through him instead of State or the White House.

Q: His sister being the American Ambassador to Ireland.

CROWE: He didn't cause me any problems, but he caused people in Washington a lot of problems.

Q: How about your relations with Ambassador Smith?

CROWE: They were pretty good. I actually like her. As an Ambassador she was terribly well liked by the Irish people, and in that regard she was a wonderful Ambassador. In regard to keeping her mind focused on the entire foreign policy of the United States, she was a mediocre ambassador. She didn't realize there were any issues besides Ireland, and she thought the British should get the hell out of the way and quit blocking progress. Offending the British didn't bother her in the least. The fact that we had other strong interests with Britain, she thought was irrelevant.



She was not kind to the people that worked for her. In the Foreign Service, she got involved in an investigation that found her to be a real autocrat. She was tough to deal with and thought Northern Ireland was her territory. That didn't upset me as much as it did the people that worked for me. They really got upset by that.

Q: You had to say "down boy," "down boy"?

CROWE: Yes, lots of times. She wanted to go to Northern Ireland and I was all for anything that would help get this thing solved. She was highly admired in Northern Ireland, she was a Kennedy! She's the best Ambassador the Irish people ever have had from the United States. Fortunately, that wasn't her job but she never figured that out.

Q: You've already mentioned it once, but did you deal with John Major or his foreign minister?

CROWE: I dealt with him a little. On Ireland he called me over a few times and said I want you to tell the President so and so, and so and so. In retrospect, I wonder why he didn't tell the President? People used to ask me if I talked to the President and I said the person who talks most to the President in this town is John Major, not me! On these issues he didn't want to say it directly to the President.

Q: How about some of the other things that were going on, such as Yugoslavia?

CROWE: We went through a host of problems and did deal with the Foreign Office on that and with the military. In essence what happened was the United States got fed up with what was going on in Europe and pushed hard for the British to enter Yugoslavia. Finally, the British said "we'll go" and then we started telling them what to do. That was a very divisive issue. Their theory was if you don't like it come over here with us and get into the pool.

I came back to Washington and got to see the President and said this telling the British what to do when we're sitting 3500 miles away is hard to defend. If you want to tell them what to do militarily, we have to go there. Don't sit back here, let them do it and then tell them how to do it. He agreed with that. That didn't mean anything because his people didn't agree with that.

Q: Was this again the NSC?

CROWE: Largely, but not solely. It was also the State Department. People like Holbrooke, they know about everything and don't mind telling people how to do things.



Q: Leaving it to the Ambassador to carry their dirty linen over to the Foreign Office and all.

CROWE: In all fairness, I don't think this is true of smaller embassies, I think they are still very powerful because they are on issues the people in Washington haven't focused on. If an issue comes up they ask the Ambassador what should we do? In a place like Britain, on big issues like NATO orientation, or Bosnia, nothing goes through the Embassy. They send over envoys, delegations, and the President talks to the Prime Minister on the phone. I had a hard time finding out what they said and I usually found out from the British, not from the Americans. Three weeks later I'd get a message, saying the President said so and so, by then that was three weeks old.

In big Embassies on big issues the Embassies are no longer in the mainstream of policy advice. Particularly in communications and meetings. They all know each other. The Embassy reports constantly, vociferously but it doesn't mean very much at all because these guys are all in the loop, particularly when the language is the same. Pena would call up the DTI on our air problems, and later say to me maybe we could use your help. I asked what he meant and he said we're talking to the British on this air control problem. I'd ask how long he'd been talking to them and he'd say several months.

Q: We're talking about the Secretary of Transportation.

CROWE: Yes, but this tendency was widespread, not confined to Secretary Pena. Someone would say we didn't need you before because we didn't have any problems, but now we need you. I said we could have helped you much more if you had come to us two months ago. It never occurred to them to go to the Embassy until trouble brewed.

Q: How about dealing with NATO? Here you had been the Southern Commander of NATO, CINCPAC [Commander in Chief, Pacific], military was your bag. You were Chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

CROWE: It was irrelevant. Q: Did this play any part at all?

CROWE: When you're in the policy business nobody wants to admit that anybody else knows more than you do. NATO is also a problem too, for many of those issues I was talking about. Russia and Bosnia were handled in Brussels instead of individual capitals. So much business goes across borders now.

Q: Did you feel there was a frustration within the ruling class, not the social class, but with the politicians and the military in Great Britain that the power was slipping away over to Europe and to Brussels?



CROWE: This was a constant theme. I don't think they understand how much it has slipped. They constantly argue about it. That's their problem with going into Europe. They don't want to sacrifice all their leverage, all their authority, all that controls their own destiny in Europe. It's much more of a problem in their Councils than it is in ours. They are in Europe; we aren't.

On the other hand, it's interesting about their economy. The British have little faith in the European economy. If you talk to the average British businessman, he'd much rather invest money in the United States than in Western Europe. They are investing heavily in the United States, 100 billion dollars! In fact I've had them say to me we have more confidence in the American economy than you do.

Q: Was it a gut reaction, you know Asia starts at Calais, or was it looking at it with this peculiar fit, particularly with France?

CROWE: They are a European country and they have all kinds of jokes about it. They can't deny they're European. They fly over every day and do business with France. We have to form a delegation, but they can get on a plane and be in Paris in 20 minutes. They don't trust each other. In dealing with a Frenchman and a German they're really scared of Germany. Many British people don't like the idea of combining with Germany.

On the other hand, the realists, who are the business people, are for a common currency. Most of the people aren't for it. Blair said we won't have it until we hold a referendum. I think in four or five years they will join the common currency.

The British are a very emotional race despite their reputation for being unemotional. They don't want to give up something to the French, they don't want to give up something to the Italians, they want control over their own lives. Yet, they know the realities are that Europe is becoming one community and they can't afford to stay outside of it. They are not going to give up the tie to the United States for Europe. If they had their way, they'd rather be part of the United States than Europe.

Q: In France you have the intelligentsia which plays a role, in Britain you have the chattering class, how important were they during your time there. Were they somebody you could tap and work with?



CROWE: They loved to talk to you and they loved to chatter, that's just about it. Most of the people that are very suspicious of the United States, and they are a definite minority in Great Britain, come from the chattering class, the intelligentsia. There are quite a number that dislike the United States because of what we've allegedly done to their culture, their language and their society. They differ in what they would prefer to do. They don't like close ties with America and can't accommodate the reality at they're not as great as they once were. They are very confused and very noisy. They are almost all Tories, extreme right. Clearly they are not the most influential people in the country, by any means. Blair's marching off without them and he's a most popular Prime Minister.

Q: Where did you see the seat of power?

CROWE: It is unlike this country. There is one seat of power and it's in London. It's not only political, it's artistic, it's industrial, everything is situated in London. In this country if you want business you go to New York, if you want Hollywood you go to Hollywood.

Q: You want oil you go to Houston.

CROWE: When I did my dissertation on the Navy in Great Britain I interviewed 120 people, not active duty but retired people and politicians. I only interviewed three people outside of London. I'd say where's this guy and they'd say he's retired in Belfast. There were only a half a dozen of them, everybody else retired in London. In the seat of power in London is the party in power Whitehall?

Q: As a practical matter, this a reachable thing. The Embassy caget to the right people quite easily.

CROWE: Oh, yes, we were wired into both the party in power and thopposition. I saw a lot of Blair before he ever came into office.

Q: Were you seeing the Tory tide was over and that Blair was cominup?

CROWE: We did very much. We didn't predict the landslide but we predicted he would win and win comfortably. Nobody predicted he would win overwhelmingly.

Q: From the time you were there were you comfortable with Blair?



CROWE: Yes, very much so. I never got any idea that he was harboring a desire to change the relationship with the United States. If you track British Prime Ministers since World War II, there has only been one that came into office with an anti-American position and actually held it the whole time and that was Edward Heath. There were several, three or four, that came into office with the idea they didn't want to get along with the Americans, but they all changed their minds rather quickly.

A British Prime Minister, with any sense at all, very quickly, no matter what his past history, comes to the conclusion I've got to get along with the United States. No question about it. The last two, Major and Blair, and Thatcher, had it as a plank in their platform. Edward Heath, he is the one who thought by cutting ties with America it would move them closer toward Europe. He believed it, he held that belief and he tried to do it in office. He's the only one who tried to distance himself from the United States.

Q: You were there at a time when the Labor Party seemed to have changed its stripes.

CROWE: Blair changed it.

Q: Before the Labor Party had always had a rather strong socialist viewpoint which turned out to be a kind of disaster.

CROWE: Blair literally took the Party by the neck and wrung its neck. I can remember him saying I didn't join the Labor Party to be a Party of protest, I joined it to be a Party of governance. We can't govern if we're not elected. He changed the Party.

Q: Did you find his left wing mumbling in the corridors?

CROWE: They were getting run over right and left to make a pun. I knew the heads of the Labor unions in the country, the head of the Association of Labor unions a very reasonable, rational man. He knew what was happening and he wasn't going to waste his capital and worked out a new arrangement with the Labor Party. There are all kinds of old labor hands that don't agree with what is going on now. That's not unique to the British Party, they've always had people in every Party that didn't agree with what the Party leadership was doing.

The revolution that Blair wrought was really one of his most amazing achievements. You would hear the Tories constantly say during the campaign, I don't trust him, will he do that after he's in power, all those Labor unions will come back. None of that has happened.



Q: You left the Ambassadorship when?

CROWE: September 20, last year.

Q: That would be 1997. Did you find a growing maturity in the White House, particularly the NSC, and the President with regard to foreign events, or was it more reactive?

CROWE: The President struck up a very fine relationship with Blair. It was almost business as usual. They discovered you could change Parties and things wouldn't change very much. The United States is the world's leader and it doesn't just deal with Great Britain. All British are fixated on what America is doing. They're much more familiar with what we're doing in our country than we are with what they're doing in their country.

They are much more historically oriented. You don't meet a Brit that isn't conscience of his history and talks about these forces, pressures, countercurrents and currents. They are much more politically oriented than Americans. It isn't true of the whole society, they have a large under class that's worried what's going to happen to their soccer team next Sunday. On the other hand, the middle class is much more consumed with government policies on trade, economy, politics, and social movements than we are.

Q: How did you find the social life there?

CROWE: I found it burdensome. I had some conversations with Ray Sietz and asked him that very question. I made it clear to Secretary Christopher that I was not an Annenberg and I would not be able to entertain on the scale that Annenberg did. He said that's not why we're sending you there. Ray said if you're prudent, you can get along on the money they give you. I found that was absolutely true. Living in Winfield House you are superbly equipped to do anything you want to socially. It's a marvelous place to entertain and the British are eager to get into it. You can do anything you want. One of things you can do, if you prefer, is buy more flowers than you can grow and have eight courses instead of three courses, and you can do anything you have the money to do there. You can lay it on really thick, if you have the money. I did not have the money. I think it's a fair statement to say the Brits don't come there to see money spent. You can have a good dinner party with what the government gives you. We entertained a lot and didn't overspend our allowance. We didn't renovate Winfield House like Mr. Annenberg did. When Mr. Annenberg was there he gave a swimming pool to Checkers, the Prime Minister. A wonderful gesture, which I could not match! I'm sure this doesn't surprise you. Incidentally, Mr. Annenberg is beloved in Great Britain, which he should be!



Q: When he went there he had a very rough time in the beginning. I've talked to people who served with him. He had a speech impediment. The British press gave him a difficult time to begin with because he tended to use long words rather than short words. I believe he could speak them easier, with his speech impediment. It made him sound stilted. It was like blood to the press, at least to begin with. Then they came around.

CROWE: I'm sure he a very difficult time. We used to talk about it a bit. I spoke a great deal in Britain. That was really my number one function, in many respects. I think today the Ambassador is not in the mainstream of policy, no matter how much he thinks he might be. His main function is interpreting what the United States is doing for the British.

Q: How did you find the staff at the Embassy?

CROWE: Great! I'm very worried about the future of the Foreign Service. I think they're in deep trouble.

Q: How is that?

CROWE: I think [the population of] Washington is worried about it. I had two executive assistants leave my office and shortly thereafter resign from the Foreign Service. They were terribly bright young people, one a woman and the other a man. I asked them why are you going to go? I gave them letters of recommendation. They said they had no future in the Foreign Service. The Foreign Service does not run the foreign policy of this country. They said there is no real assurance of advancement, nobody listens to what we do in Washington and the one thing the Foreign Service told me I would do that is true is travel a lot. That's not enough to keep us in the Foreign Service. They wanted more of future than that. People constantly do things without consulting with the Embassy. I think this Administration has been very negligent in that regard.

Q: I think these are difficulties with a new group coming in. Again you have these hard charging...

CROWE: You don't have any leadership in Washington that worries about the Foreign Service. No Secretary of State is going to worry about it, they'll give lip service to it. The number three guy is supposed to but he's pretty busy. I went to talk to Tom Pickering about some of my frustrations. He said oh yes, we'll have a Blue Ribbon Commission look at this problem. He asked if I would like to be on it, and I said yes. I came back after London and concluded that they're not so worried about this problem, why should I be so excited about it?



Q: There are real institutional problems. We're still getting goopeople in, whether we retain them...

CROWE: That's not going to keep up. The whole thing has to be redone. We're working in a new mode with an archaic structure. I agree that the change in the Embassy structure, or to change who you send over there would cause problems overseas. With modern communications, however, foreign policy is not done the way it used to be developed. If you really want to influence foreign policy, you have to get a job in Washington and come right up and never leave the Department.

Q: Often the path is through being, unfortunately I think, staff aides who never really have real responsibility. They spend their time running around giving advice and getting their principals to do things. I think this is a very serious problem.

CROWE: The military has the same problem. At least in the military you're taught from the beginning to worry about your people. We fight for our people. I don't see that in the State Department.

Q: How did you find the Embassy as far as its contacts and getting things done?

CROWE: Very good. They work hard at it. We had superb people with great leads in the British Government, at every level. With my military experience we had great leads into the military of Great Britain.

Q: What was your impression of the British Military? One thinks of its role as continually diminishing, yet they have a very good professional Military.

CROWE: They do. Highly trained and disciplined and the point of the sword is very sharp. They don't have anything behind the point of the sword. The bulk of the cuts they've made are in logistics and support functions. They can't go anywhere without us, they need a lot of fundamental help every time they deploy.

Their Navy is very small and the Air Force is about to disappear. Their Army is highly experienced in Ireland and can tell us a lot about counterterrorism and civil control, but we don't listen because we think we know everything. That's not true, we can get a lot of advice from them. They are not a global army or global force anymore. We're the only one that can move them around, but they fight well. They are professional and highly trained.

Q: When you left there, after Blair's election in April, did you find there was this affinity between Clinton and Blair?



CROWE: It was extremely strong.

Q: Did this come up at all?

CROWE: Yes, I sat in on meetings with them. I think they do have political instincts which draw them together.

Q: You left there in September, have you retired? You do have another job now.

CROWE: I don't have any regular work, I just hang out here.

Q: Okay, thank you.

End of interview